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Media Relations

September 25, 2013

UNH Analysis Leads to Change in How Child Support is Calculated in N.H.

DURHAM, N.H. – An extensive analysis of New Hampshire child support guidelines by the University of New Hampshire has resulted in a substantial change in how child support is calculated in the Granite State.

The UNH researchers recommended that the state adopt the income shares model for calculating child support. The idea behind the income shares model is that a child should receive the same amount of financial support had the family remained intact. Under the new formula, the incomes of each parent are combined to determine the total amount that would have been spent on the child, and each parent's contribution toward child support is allotted based on that joint income figure.

Previously, one parent was assessed a percentage of his or her income to provide to the other parent, regardless of the other parent's income, even if the parent receiving the child support actually made more than the parent providing the support.

The new child support guidelines went into effect July 1, 2013.

"We found that the guidelines originally established were not truly representing the intent of the original guidelines. The courts had changed, families had changed, custody had changed, but the guidelines awarding custody and encumbering support of children in New Hampshire had not changed," said [Malcolm Smith](#), [UNH Cooperative Extension](#) professor and an affiliate professor of [education](#).

"We found that the policies did not reflect the current state of child support. At the time the guidelines had passed, most cases resulted in primary custody granted to one parent -- usually the mother -- and that was it. Now, custody decisions are usually joint -- 20 to 50 percent to each parent," Smith said.

The state is required to have its child support guidelines reviewed every four years. This was the first time a team from UNH conducted the analysis. The 2009 review was conducted by Smith; [Michael Kalinowski](#), associate professor of [family studies](#); [Reagan Baughman](#), associate professor of [economics](#); and [Megan Henly](#), a doctoral student in [sociology](#).

The UNH team conducted extensive research and analysis. Researchers reviewed current literature and guidelines, met with key stakeholders, held four public forums, solicited input by mail and email from parents paying and receiving child support as well as other interested parties, conducted site visits with child support staff in six states, and completed an economic review of alternative formulas and sources of child expenditure data.

"We talked to everyone. We held hearings across the state, we interviewed case workers at Child Support Services, we met with lawyers, surveyed judges, and most importantly received input from citizens across the state who were affected by the guidelines. We found there was frustration on all sides," Smith said.

In light of the state's child support guideline reforms made based on UNH's analysis, other states now have partnered with or are considering partnerships with their flagship state universities to reform their child support guidelines.

“Making sure the courts and the Department of Health and Human Services have solid guidance in making custody decisions and figuring the cost of child support ultimately insures a better life for our state's most precious natural resource – our children,” Smith said.

“Our legacy as a land-grant state university is founded on the idea that research conducted at UNH should broadly serve the state of New Hampshire and its citizens. Partnerships such as this one underscore that mission and emphasize our role as a national research university,” he said.

The [University of New Hampshire](#), founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

REPORT

2009 N.H. Child Support Guidelines Review and Recommendations

Submitted by the University of New Hampshire

<http://www.guidelineeconomics.com/files/NH%202009%20child%20support%20guidelines%20report.pdf>

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